

Breathing Techniques Help Special Needs Kids Control Their Behavior

By Patti Teel
www.pattiteel.com

Breathing techniques are very important for inducing relaxation. They are effective for all children but can be particularly beneficial for those with special needs because it can help to avoid panic, aggression, meltdowns, or tantrums. The ultimate goal is for children to be able to relax quickly when faced with stressful situations. However, in order to do so, it's important for children to practice breathing techniques on a daily basis, so that they become second nature.

Children are naturally fascinated by their own breathing, just getting quiet and paying attention to it is extremely soothing. Rather than thinking about the events and worries of their day, as children focus on their own breath, their minds will become quiet. Their breathing will also automatically slow down and deepen, bringing more oxygen into their bodies and helping them to relax. In the Floppy Sleep Game program, kids will practice being very quiet as they simply watch their breath. They don't need to try to change their breath in any way. In fact, they don't have to do anything. They will just be watching the breath as it breathes itself. It will be a time of undoing, allowing, and letting go—a time to gather the senses that are usually focused on the outside world and turning them inward. After a few days of this simple yet valuable activity, I suggest you introduce children to belly breathing (that is diaphragmatic breathing.)

Diaphragmatic breathing, or "belly breathing," is a wonderful way to release mental and physical stress and tension. It calms the mind and induces a state of relaxation in children's bodies. The directions are simple: have your child lay on his back—and putting a hand on his belly, take slow, deep breaths, feeling his belly rise and fall.

Because it's so much more fun for children to learn when imagination and fantasy are involved, visualization can be interwoven into the breathing techniques. For instance, when practicing belly breathing, have your child imagine that there is a colorful balloon in his or her belly.

Elevator breathing also incorporates visualization and it can be introduced after your child is comfortable with belly breathing. Children will be learning to isolate three areas; the head, the chest, and the abdomen. This pranayama (yoga breathing technique) focuses the attention on the present moment, while calming and grounding the mind. It is often done while seated in a comfortable, cross-legged position, but it is also nice to do while lying on the back. When your children are lying down, they can really feel the breath moving through their bodies as it makes contact with the floor.

Elevator Breathing

Begin by having your children observe the natural inhalation and exhalation of their breath without changing anything, then proceed with the directions.

Directions:

Your breath is an elevator taking a ride through your body.
Breathe in through your nose and start the elevator ride.
Breathe out and feel your breath go all the way to the basement, down to your toes.
Breathe in and take your elevator breath up to your belly.
Hold it. Now, breathe out all your air. (Pause)
This time, breathe in and take your elevator breath up to your chest.
Hold it. Now breathe out all your air. (Pause)
Now breathe in and take your elevator breath up to the top floor,
up through your throat and into your face and forehead.

TIME OUT WITH PATTI TEEL

DREAM THE DREAM AND STEP INTO IT

Feel your head fill with breath. Hold it.
Now breathe out and feel your elevator breath take all your troubles
and worries down through your chest, your belly, your legs,
and out through the elevator doors in your feet.
(Repeat)

Day time Follow up: Blow up a real balloon. Show children how it fills up, from the bottom, the middle and finally the top. Let out some air. Watch the balloon deflate from the top, the middle, and the bottom. Explain that they can inflate and deflate the air of their imaginary balloon (in their bellies and chest) in the same way.

Dubbed "The Dream Maker" by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at www.pattiteel.com. You can listen to her online radio show at www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com.